

ISLANDS OUT OF TIME

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In the year 1722, a vessel captained by the Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen sailed round the tip of South America, through the Straits of Magellan, and into the Pacific Ocean looking for a lost island, reportedly sighted by a British explorer and privateer fifty years earlier, and called after him the 'Isle of Davis'. The Dutch expedition never found this legendary land, but instead on 5 April (Easter Day) they sighted a small island. They called this tiny and remote landfall 'Easter Island'.

Remarkably it proved to have a human population. They lived what seemed to the Dutch sailors a simple life, with yams, bananas and fowl for food. But one thing was extraordinary: the large stone statues with which many of their ceremonial places were decorated. These striking monuments were apparently built by the inhabitants of this small island on the easternmost fringe of Polynesia, 1500 miles from the nearest land.

At first sight it may not be obvious what bearing that discovery has upon our own great prehistoric monuments in the British Isles—stone circles such as Avebury or Stonehenge, or megalithic tombs such as the West Kennet long barrow. Certainly it would be nonsensical to think of any direct link between them. Yet we can learn from 'the mystery of Easter Island', the paradoxical occurrence of major building works in a tiny and remote area, with a small population entirely lacking the advanced technology of urban civilisation. For in a sense this is the same problem which has perplexed antiquaries and archaeologists who have tried to explain our own great European prehistoric monuments. How did they do it? Could they have done it without some assistance, if only indirect, from some more advanced technology? The best way to answer these questions, I believe, is for the archaeologists to look across the

world to Polynesia, where some of the answers are beginning to emerge.

The Problem of the Monuments

For centuries the prehistoric monuments of Britain have puzzled and teased the imagination of scholars. Already in the twelfth century Geoffrey of Monmouth mentions Stonehenge in his *Chronicle*, and relates that the stones had been transported from Ireland and erected at Stonehenge by the magic arts of the wizard Merlin. The great architect Inigo Jones visited Stonehenge during the reign of James the First and pronounced it to be of Roman construction, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries scholarly opinion came to favour the Druids, the Celtic priests whom Julius Caesar encountered on his expedition to Britain. But in truth very little was known of such monuments, or of the collective burial chambers, the megalithic tombs, which are common in the British Isles and in other areas of north-western Europe. So it was that the British antiquary Sir Richard Colt Hoare, writing in 1807, could say of the Irish megalithic tomb Newgrange and of these other monuments:

I shall not unnecessarily trespass upon the time and patience of my readers in endeavouring to ascertain what tribes first peopled this country, nor to what nation the construction of this singular monument may reasonably be attributed, for, I fear, both its authors and its original destination will ever remain unknown. Conjecture may wander over its wild and spacious domains but will never bring home with it either truth or conviction. Alike will the histories of those stupendous temples at Avebury and Stonehenge which grace my native county remain involved in obscurity and oblivion.

Fortunately Colt Hoare was too pessimistic, and gradually archaeology was able to establish a series of facts about these monuments. It soon emerged that they belong to the neolithic period, built that is by the early farming population of Britain, at a time before copper or bronze tools were used.

For many years, indeed until just ten years ago, it was believed that the megalithic tombs of Europe were the result of a movement of colonisation, or at least a wave of influence, from the more civilised lands of the eastern Mediterranean. There monumental stone tombs were being constructed from around 2500 BC. So it seemed likely that the first European megalithic tombs were those of Spain, built perhaps just a little after 2500 BC, and that the techniques of construction, the practice of collective burial, and

perhaps the religion which went with them, gradually spread across Europe, reaching the British Isles around 2000 BC or a few centuries after.

This clear picture has been completely disrupted, however, first by the application of radiocarbon dating, and then by the use of tree-ring dates to correct and modify the radiocarbon dates further. It now seems clear that the megalithic tombs of north-western Europe were being built earlier than anything comparable in the east Mediterranean: the earliest of them, in Brittany, before 4000 BC.

So the old idea of the 'diffusion' of culture from the more civilised lands of the Near East can no longer be used to explain the megalithic tomb architecture of Britain. Nor can it explain for us the construction of the even larger and greater monuments, the so-called henges, of which Stonehenge and Avebury are the most famous examples. Until a decade ago it could reasonably be argued that they were the result of some influences from the more civilised cultures of Mycenaean Greece. As one distinguished writer put it: 'Is it then any more incredible that the architect of Stonehenge should himself have been a Mycenaean than that the monument should have been designed and erected, with all its unique and sophisticated detail, by mere barbarians?'

Today, however, the barbarians have it. The new dating makes entirely clear that the megalithic tombs are a European phenomenon, built by 'barbarians' – if by that term one means a population with a fairly low level of technology, lacking the use of metal, without writing, and without urban centres. Likewise the great henge monuments, from Mount Pleasant in the south right up to the Ring of Brogar in the Orkney Islands, must be seen as the work of the descendants of the early megalith builders, descendants who at 2000 BC were still (in the same sense) 'barbarians'.

How then did they do it? What special skills did they have? What forces impelled them to invest so many man-hours in such monuments? How could these simple societies marshal the skills and co-ordinate the manpower for such massive undertakings, which represent in some cases millions of man-hours? Perhaps, faced with these difficult questions, it is not surprising that a few writers with uncontrolled imaginations and an eye for the lurid have written of flying saucers, of intelligence from outer space, and of lost and secret lore. But that is the easy explanation, and one without a single shred of sound evidence to sustain it.

The right explanation, demanding the exercise of a more con-

trolled imagination, implies greater respect for the abilities of the human species. It involves the acceptance that 'natives' – whether in neolithic Britain or in Polynesia of just a century or two ago – are not idiots, and that, on the contrary, 'barbarians' differ from us mainly in their lack of advanced technology. It is here that the Polynesian experience has so much to teach us. And we are fortunate that the greatest of all the Pacific explorers, active just two centuries ago, was a man of humane intelligence and curiosity: the 'Great Circumnavigator', Captain Cook.

The Concept of Chieftdom Society

When Captain Cook visited the Pacific, he found in some of the island groups societies which were highly structured, highly organised. Social relations were ordered by rules of conduct as rigorous (and as courteous) as any in contemporary Europe. And in the Friendly Islands (the modern kingdom of Tonga), in the Society Islands (the modern Tahiti) and in Hawaii (which he himself first discovered for the western world) he described communities with a very coherent system of government. In each the ruler was a chief of very high status, whose person was regarded as sacred and surrounded by taboos as elaborate as in any European monarchy.

Much of this did not, I think, greatly astonish him, for he was of course accustomed to the England of King George III. But it fascinates me, for here we have a direct insight into the working of a society with the simplest of technologies – none of the Polynesian communities knew the use of metal (they were amazed by metal axes, and Cook's sailors could obtain all manner of goods and services in exchange for just a few iron nails).

Cook described for us what modern anthropologists sometimes term a 'chieftdom' society. Societies with a similar structure and social organisation have been described from other parts of the world, including Africa, and they share a number of common features which, I believe, can be of real help to us in understanding those rather remote and mysterious communities of prehistoric Britain which were responsible for the erection of our great monuments. The key to the problem lies in social organisation, in what I like to call Social Archaeology. Unless we can begin to reconstruct the basic features of a prehistoric society – not just its technology (what tools they used, what food they ate), but social aspects too – we shall have no understanding of its capabilities. We need to know how large social groups were. Did they have a central organisation, central leadership? What were their relations with neighbouring

communities? How much energy did they invest in religious activities? The Chiefdom Model gives us a very general picture of one kind of structure, which it is profitable to apply to prehistoric Europe.

In chiefdom societies, kinship is a dominating principle. Who you are – your place in life – depends on who you are born, on the status of the parents. But this status is not simply a question of ‘class’, or of hereditary wealth, as in most state societies. It depends upon kinship in a more subtle way – each individual, whether of high or low rank, is a member of a group, and the groups themselves are ranked and regulated kinship. Those whose hereditary links them most closely to the chief are of the highest status.

One such arrangement has been termed by the anthropologist Marshal Sahlins the ‘conical clan’ – conical because the lineage lines all lead back to the founding ancestor at the apex, whose direct descendant (usually in the male line) is the paramount chief. The hereditary lineage organisation in such a society is reflected in the

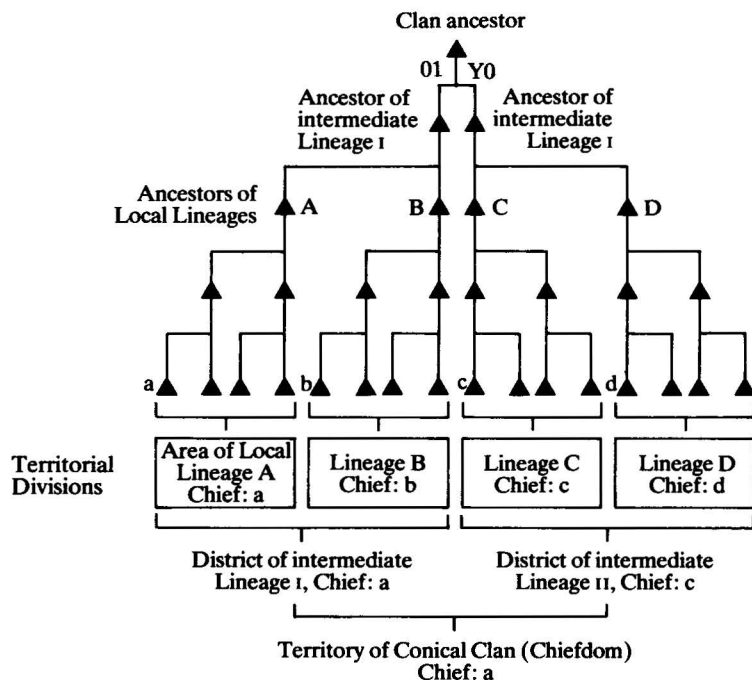




Plate 1. Performance of a night dance before Captain Cook and his party on Ha'apai (engraving after J. Webber).

experience at first hand some of the features of chiefdom society. And while the details are different, in escaping from the preoccupations of the western world with its aggressively market economy and its mass production, one is able to see more clearly just how a chiefdom society can work.

Traditional Tonga

Captain Cook spent several weeks in Tonga during his Third Voyage to the Pacific, arriving in May 1777. His published account, and the detailed journals which he and some of his officers kept, are a precious document of the functioning of a chiefdom society before it was extensively influenced by European culture, indeed the earliest full account of such a society in existence. (Some would claim that the descriptions by Caesar and Tacitus of the iron-age Britons and Gauls could be so designated, but Cook's sympathetic curiosity about the lives and customs of the natives far exceeded theirs.)

Soon after his arrival Cook was entertained by dancing, and he and his colleagues have left detailed descriptions of these occasions, one of which ends with the assessment: 'The dance was musical and harmonious and all their motions were performed with such justness that the whole party moved and acted as one man. It was the opinion of every one of us that such a performance would have met with universal applause on a European theatre.'

Even more valuable than these descriptions are the drawings which Cook's illustrators made, many of which were engraved and published at the end of the Voyage. The finest of these draughtsmen was Webber, who was responsible for most of the illustrations accompanying the account of Cook's Third Voyage. Some of Cook's illustrators have been criticised for romanticising, for drawing what they imagined rather than what they saw, and there is some truth in these accusations. Yet these engravings surpass in quality any earlier ethnographic illustration. Webber's views of the night dances on the island of Ha'apai contain many authentic touches of detail – any European who has had to sit cross-legged for several hours on such an occasion will recognise the rather uncomfortable attitudes of the Europeans in the front row (including Cook himself) with their 'backs to the camera'.

The Christian missionaries who succeeded Cook in Tonga worked consistently to extinguish most that was original and traditional in Tongan life, forcing the natives to conform to European conventions about what was good and moral. Dancing, conceived as a pagan activity, was stopped altogether for a while, until the natives



Plate 2. Modern dancers in Makave perform the *lakalaka*.

'invented' some new dances which, lacking the pagan associations of the earlier ones, were seen as acceptable. Happily the newly-invented dances seem in fact to have much in common with those seen by Cook, with the same emphasis on a whole line of figures moving together in harmony and the same exquisitely graceful movements of the hands. The modern *lakalaka*, where the dancers sing in harmony as they move, still gives the observer an authentic glimpse of the harmony and perfection of traditional Tongan song and dance, a reminder of the consummate artistry of which technologically simple societies are capable.

The same sense of continuity, of the old not fundamentally changed beneath the surface of the new, is seen in other aspects of Tongan society. The King of Tonga today, His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, receives much the same traditional respects as did his ancestors who held the office of Tu'i Tonga, traditional head of Tongan society. As he remarked to Magnus Magnusson and myself: 'When you consider the changes that have taken place in Tonga over the last 150 years, they have been very big changes, and yet it hasn't really affected village life all that much, particularly in the smaller more affluent villages.'

It was such a village, Makave on the northern island of Vava'u, which we visited at the King's suggestion. On our arrival we were at once greeted by the chief, the Honourable Tu'i'afitu, one of the hereditary nobles of Tonga, and conducted to the village hall for a ceremony of welcome. This is the ceremony of the *kava*, a drink made from the *kava* root, and its interest is great, since nothing shows more clearly the formalism of traditional Tongan society. Webber has left a beautiful engraving of a *kava* ceremony two centuries ago, which incidentally illustrates well the sophistication of Tongan building using wood and matting. Today, just as two centuries ago (and no doubt for centuries before that), the chief sits cross-legged flanked on each side by his retainers and guests.

In front there is an open space, and opposite is the man who will make the *kava* drink, seated behind a three-legged wooden bowl. On the Chief's right and left are his two *matapules* – 'talking chiefs' or heralds: the herald of the right and the herald of the left. The chief himself says nothing throughout, and it is his *matapule* who pronounces the instructions to grind the root and put it in the bowl, to pour in water, to remove the root after soaking, and then to serve the drink (in a coconut cup) to each of those present, in an order as strictly prescribed by etiquette as the seating of a banquet in Buckingham Palace.



Plate 3. The Honourable Tu'i'afitu at the *kava* ceremony in the village of Makave on Vava'u.

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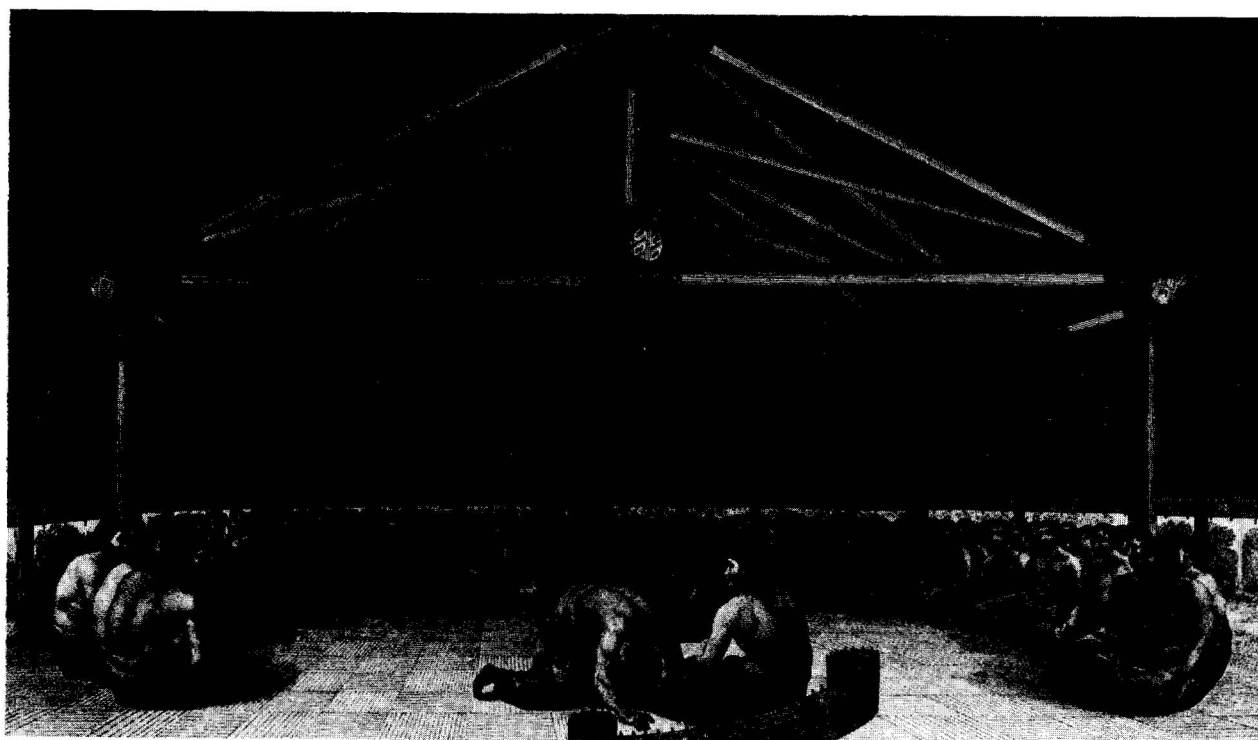


Plate 4. The Tongan *kava* ceremony (engraving after Webber).

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Plate 5. The *inasi* ceremony at Mu'a, with a burial mound (*langi*) behind (engraving after Webber).

I found participation in this ceremony an altogether remarkable experience. Not only was it a great honour to be the guest of the Honourable Tu'i'afitu on such an occasion, but as an archaeologist I could not help remarking on how little of all that went on would find any direct trace in the archaeological record. The most formal *kava* ceremony held during our stay, which involved the presentation of a pig, was held outdoors on the village green. Apart from the stone used to pound the *kava* root, most of the artefacts used were of perishable materials and would not survive in the archaeological record. Even the fine hall depicted in Webber's drawing would leave little for the archaeologist beyond a few post-holes in the earth, very like those which have in fact been found at the henge monument at Durrington Walls in Wiltshire. But above all, the traditional formality and strictness of etiquette was impressive. As Cook put it: 'There is a decorum observed in the presence of their great men that is truly admirable. Whenever he sits down, all those with him seat themselves at the same time in a semi-circle before him, leaving always an open convenient space between him and them.' No one who has participated in such a ceremony could doubt the powers of organisation or the social complexity of a society which, if technology were the only criterion, might have to be regarded as composed of 'mere barbarians.'

The ceremony of the presentation of the pig was interesting in many ways. Once again it was conducted with a formulaic elaboration, according to precise rules. It was presented to the chief, the Honourable Tu'i'afitu, and he, in accordance with convention, in turn sent it on to be presented to the man senior to him in the hierarchy, the Governor of Vava'u. Here in fact is a last vestige of the traditional system of redistribution, a feature of most chiefdom societies.

Redistribution, or at least one component of it, was most strikingly seen by Captain Cook in Tonga at the great *inasi* ceremony, the ceremony of the first fruits, usually held in October. It took place at Mu'a on Tongatapu, the main island of the Tonga group. Mu'a was the traditional home and centre of the Tu'i Tonga, the head of Tongan society, as well as the burial place of his ancestors. Their great burial mounds or *langi* are seen in the background of Webber's drawing. At the ceremony it was usual for the chiefs and population of the area to bring their first fruits and offer them to the Tu'i Tonga. Much of the ceremonial was complicated, and little understood by Cook, who was only allowed to be present on condition that he removed his shirt and loosed his hair. One of his



Plate 6. Burial mound or *langi* of the Tu'i Tonga at Mu'a, Tongatapu.

officers wrote:

We who were on the outside were not a little surprised at seeing Captain Cook in the procession of the Chiefs with his hair hanging loose and his body naked down to the waist, no person being admitted covered above the waist or with his hair tied. I do not pretend to dispute the propriety of Captain Cook's conduct, but I cannot help thinking he rather let himself down.

Today the verdict is reversed and nothing could more effectively document the value of Cook as an observer than his respect for the community which he was visiting.

Such ceremonies in many societies have a religious as well as a social significance, indeed the two cannot be distinguished, and Cook's colleague Anderson rightly observed: 'This ceremony which is call'd Natche has so much mystery running through the whole that it is hard to tell whether it is most of the religious or political kind.'

There is much more about Tongan society today which recalls that of two centuries ago – the yam plantations, the manufacture of bark cloth, the language itself are little changed. And there is much in both which is perplexing and thought-provoking to an archaeologist asking himself how many of the activities of a sophisticated and complex society, where many of the artefacts are of wood, will be preserved in the archaeological record. But let us leave Tonga with the words of Cook himself:

I must notwithstanding conclude by observing that the natives of Tonga and the isles around it are upon the whole arrived at as much perfection in their manual works, as much regularity in their government, at as high a pitch in the agriculture and some other things as any nation whatever under the same circumstances: and that exclusive of the helps obtained from learning the use of metals and communication with nations who have these advantages, they are in every respect almost as perfectly civilis'd as it is possible for mankind to be. They seem to have been long at their ultimum, and at least by what we may judge from the general description of them given by Tasman they have been so for above these hundred and thirty years, and had they not been visited by Europeans would probably ever have remained the same.

The Easter Island Monuments

In the previous section I have not attempted to draw many conclusions from those observations on traditional Tongan society. But they are already of great value when we come to Easter Island, at the

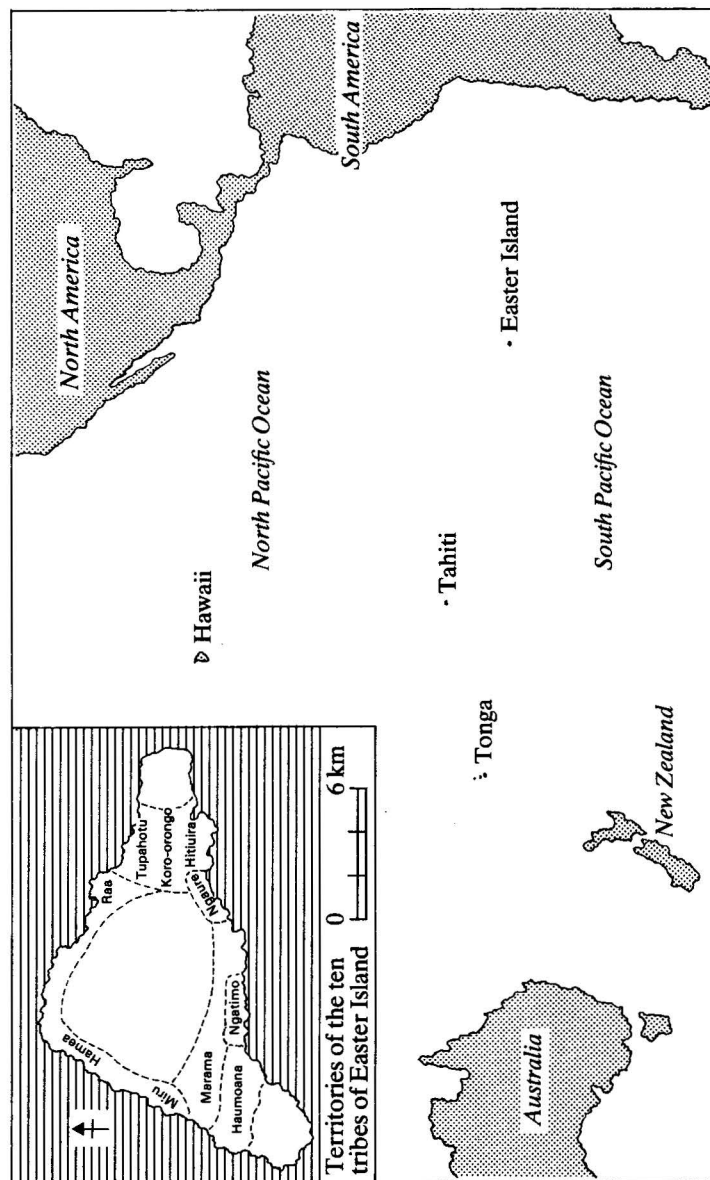


Figure 2. Map of Pacific with inset of Easter Island, showing tribal divisions.

extreme eastern end of Polynesia, for the society there was in effect destroyed by the terrible Peruvian slave raid of 1862. It was only after that time that the remarkable wooden inscriptions in the *rongo rongo* script came to light. We have little first-hand knowledge about this Easter Island writing, or about the use of the great monuments, the *ahu*, surmounted by those extraordinary statues.

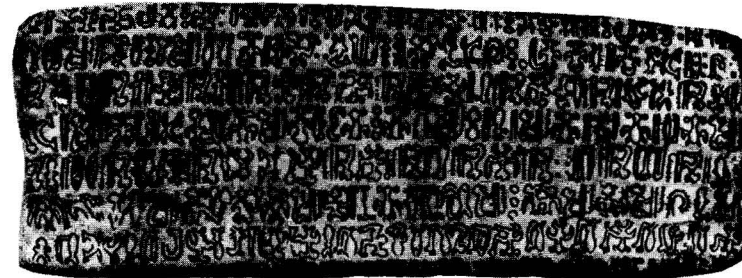


Plate 7. Easter Island *rongo rongo* tablet.

Indeed, it is not surprising that some writers should speak of a 'mystery' of Easter Island. For there is no doubt that one of the most remarkable sights in the world is at the volcanic crater of Rano Raraku, where the statues were quarried. Evidently they were carved before being transported, with only the fine details incomplete, and for reasons which may never be clear, a great many statues were hewn from the rock, presumably well in advance of requirements. There they still stand in their dozens and hundreds, gazing enigmatically across the Pacific.

At the same time the element of mystery should not be exaggerated. The language of Easter Island survives today and it is a Polynesian language. Archaeology has helped to clarify the pre-history of the area, and Easter Island was probably settled by Polynesians coming from the west (perhaps from the Marquesas Islands) around the time of Christ. There seems no need for the theories of Thor Heyerdahl, proposing contact with South America. The custom of building ceremonial monuments is quite common elsewhere in Polynesia, for instance in Tahiti, and statues not unlike those of Easter Island (although smaller in size) are also known.

What is special about Easter Island is the intensity of the *ahu*-building activity. They are dotted along the coast, imposing platforms with one or several statues looking inland, dominating the plaza behind the *ahu*. Their significance was appreciated by Cook



Plate 8. Easter Island statues at Ahu Akivi.

and his colleagues, who visited Easter Island in 1774 (although on account of illness Cook did not himself go ashore):

Stone images whose names we got from the natives, and by what I could understand from them they were erected to the memory of their chiefs, for they all had different names and they always called them *ariki* which I understand to be the king or chief, and they do not appear to pay the respect to them that I should think they would to a deity.

It seems fairly clear that Easter Island at this time was divided into territories, and that each territory was the home of a tribe or lineage (see figure 2). The approximate territorial division was recorded in 1914 and it may be reasonable to regard each of the main image *ahu* as the focal centre for the lineage territory. Easter Island society does not seem to have been welded into a single coherent polity with a single political leader, as Tonga was. So there is no single political centre to compare with the seat of the Tu'i Tonga at Mu'a, with its great series of burial monuments. Certainly Easter Island did have a ritual centre at Orongo, but through much of its history there may have been an element of competition among the various lineages, which is perhaps reflected in the grandiloquent monumentality of their focal *ahu*.

With some knowledge of Polynesian social organisation, it is possible to see how the society of Easter Island, despite its special features, does not stand apart. The *ahu* of Easter Island may be compared with the *langi* of Tonga or with the *marae* of Tahiti. Perhaps their very isolation led to the great florescence in the statue building which accompanied them.

Even the *rongo rongo* tablets can begin to fall into position when we recall that they were apparently used exclusively in conjunction with religious chants. They may have acted as mnemonic devices, like the string figures traditionally made on some other Polynesian islands. Indeed for me the most exciting experience on Easter Island was to meet Amalia Tepano, an old lady who remembers not only how to make some of the traditional string figures but also some of the chants that go with them. I think there is little doubt that some of these are real *rongo rongo* chants, which the wise men of Easter Island society used to sing using not string figures but *rongo rongo* tablets as their *aide mémoire*. Listening to the chant of Amalia Tepano is as close as we shall ever get to the lost secret of the *rongo rongo* writing.



Plate 9. Amalia Tepano with one of the traditional string figures of Easter Island.

Stonehenge Revisited

I have deliberately avoided referring to Stonehenge directly in the two preceding sections. But anyone who has really puzzled over the problem of our neolithic monuments in south Britain will already see something of what I am getting at. It is my belief that the major henge monuments of Britain – great sites such as Durrington Walls, or Avebury or Stonehenge itself – could only have been built by some centralised and coordinated society, of the kind which we can today call a chiefdom society (see chapter 8).

Clearly a degree of mobilisation was needed to provide the manpower for these great works, and the economic device which made all of this possible must have been redistribution. It is likely, although not certain, that this was still a kin-based society – there is no need to suggest the clear-cut division into separate social classes characteristic of state societies. It is likely that there was indeed a

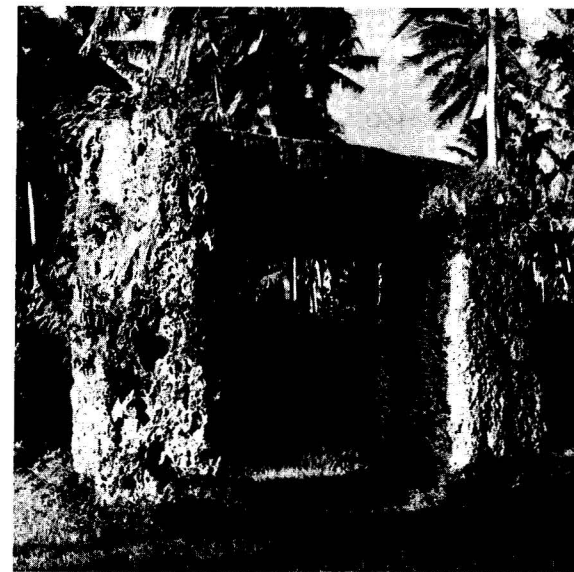


Plate 10. (above) Stonehenge trilithon; (below) Tonga trilithon, the Ha'amonga a Maui on Tongatapu.

paramount chief behind the construction of Stonehenge and Silbury Hill. Yet I believe that in the Salisbury Plain it is possible to distinguish traces of the same kind of territorial division suggested for Easter Island. In the early neolithic period long barrows are seen, burial mounds which may have been the focal points for very small communities. But soon larger and more widely-spaced focal points emerge – the causewayed camps. In the late neolithic period these are superseded by the major henges, which in territorial terms may be regarded as the equivalent of the great image *ahu* of the ten tribal territories of Easter Island. That is to say, they may have been the focal point of the tribal territory, the main home of the tribal chief, and the site of both social and religious ceremonies; as Cook's colleague observed, the religious and the political cannot always be separated. Then at the end of the period, neolithic monument-building in Britain culminates in the erection of Stonehenge and Silbury Hill.

Of course there can be no doubt that Stonehenge represents also a close experience and interest in astronomy: Stonehenge was a solar observatory. Yet here again Polynesia can offer us parallels – although they need be no more than that. The present King of Tonga has claimed that the remarkable trilithon, the Ha'amonga a Maui was used for solar observations, and there can be no doubt that the economic system there allowed for much craft specialisation. There is no reason why the society of Stonehenge should not have allowed for men as erudite as the *rongo rongo* chanters of Easter Island, as steeped in traditional lore as the *matapule* of Tonga, and as skilled in astronomical observation as we know were the Polynesian navigators.

There is no need then to argue that the builders of Stonehenge must have been possessed of some special skills derived from the Near East. Nor do I see much virtue in recent attempts that have been made to suggest that this must have been a state society of the kind represented by the Ancient Maya of Mesoamerica. The Polynesian experience does not tell us what happened in England around 2000 bc, but it does show us the potential of chiefdom societies, with a low level of technology and the complete absence of urban centres, in achieving remarkable works of communal endeavour and traditional specialised skill.

Let me stress again, therefore, that my argument here does not depend upon any supposed one-to-one correspondence between traditional Polynesian society and British society of four thousand years ago. There is no cause for the traditional pedantic complaints

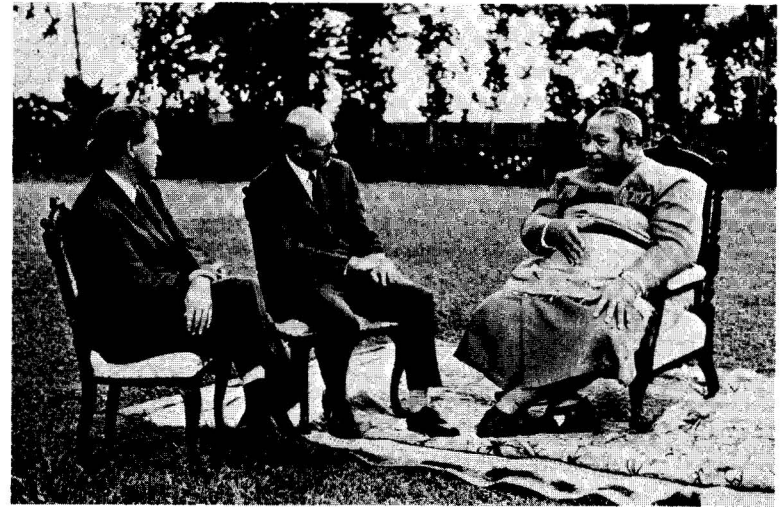


Plate 11. Magnus Magnusson and Colin Renfrew with HM the King of Tonga at Nuku'alofa.

about the dangers of 'ethnographic analogy', with which academics like to restrict the range of discussion. My claim is that both the Salisbury Plain of 4000 years ago and Tonga of two centuries ago may be seen as examples, different examples, of a recurrent social form, namely chiefdom society. Many of the resemblances which occur are structural resemblances arising from this underlying regularity: others come from ecological constraints such as the use of wood for domestic architecture.

In conclusion I shall quote once again Cook's colleague Anderson who knew and understood traditional Tongan society as well as any modern anthropologist has done. His remarks apply to many chiefdom societies, and *for this reason* and not through any superficial similarity between two cases, they are relevant to prehistoric Britain:

In several respects the Government resembles the old feudal states of Europe, where though all acknowledge the Sovereignty of the Prince there are many who seem to exercise their authority with no less restraint in their several provinces, and are in some respects wholly independent unless in the single circumstance of paying homage due to the Lord of all. The island is divided into many districts, each of which has a chief who may be considered as Lords or Barons. . . . The immediate

dependents of these Chiefs who are very numerous assume the names of their masters (besides their own proper name) and use it as was customary amongst the Scottish clans.

Each of these no doubt decides differences and distributes justice in their several districts. . . . Whether it be from that mode of government or some other policy to which we are strangers, it does not appear that any civilis'd nations have as yet exceeded them in the great order they observe on all occasions and ready compliance with the commands of their chiefs, nor in the harmony that subsists throughout all ranks and unites them as if one man inform'd with and directed by the same principle.

This, then, is the essential clue to the understanding of chieftdom society and through it to an explanation of the early monuments of Britain. Human originality, and the creative capacity of human societies, albeit with a simple technology, should never be underrated, whether they border the Atlantic or lie in the Pacific. [1978]

Acknowledgements

My experience of modern Polynesian society is based on a voyage made in the agreeable company of Messrs David Collison, Roy Henman, Magnus Magnusson, David South and John Tellick, which also owed much to the encouragement of the late Paul Johnstone. In Tonga we were aided by the personal interest of HM King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, and in Makave I am much indebted to the hospitality and friendship of the Hon. Tu'i'afitu, his wife Luisa and son Niulala and to the help of Mr Epele Kauvaka. I should like to acknowledge the assistance and advice on Easter Island of Mr Sergio Rapu and Professor and Mrs William Ayres.

MONUMENTS, MOBILISATION AND
SOCIAL ORGANISATION IN
NEOLITHIC WESSEX

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THE STRUCTURE OF Neolithic societies in Western Europe may have been a great deal less egalitarian than the lack of differentiation in their artifacts might lead us to believe.

(R. J. C. Atkinson 1961, 299)

The principal recorded sites of the neolithic period of south Britain are monumental: either funeral mounds sometimes more than 300 ft long, or circular enclosures, with a bank and internal ditch, frequently more than 100 ft in diameter. We know much less of settlement sites, or of more modest burial conventions. Yet the artefacts found are unimpressive: simple pottery, bone and stone tools, and some handsome axes, often of imported stone (Piggott 1954). Explanations are needed for the monuments of prehistoric Britain, and indeed many writers have stressed that both the 'causewayed camps' of the early neolithic, and the 'henges' of the later neolithic are almost uniquely British features. They can be discussed most profitably in local terms.

The changes for which some explanation is here desired are those seen in the neolithic of south Britain, and specifically in Wessex (Wiltshire and Dorset) which resulted in the construction of these monuments. In the first place there are the long burial mounds or 'barrows', generally earthen, of the early neolithic period. At the same time as those, probably before 4000 BC in calendar years, causewayed enclosures were constructed. Then, possibly later in the earlier neolithic period, there are the remarkable 'cursus' monuments – earthen banks sometimes running for several miles, and bounded by parallel ditches about 300 ft apart.

Later in the neolithic, in the third millennium BC (in calendar years), very large henge monuments were constructed, of which